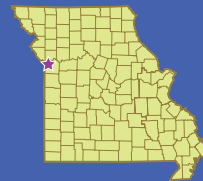


Upper Blue River

Conservation Opportunity Area



Osage
Plains



A centuries-old chinkapin oak spreads its limbs over limestone glades at Blue River Glades Natural Area. Natural Areas like the glades are considered features of statewide significance.

Pat Whalen

When Jackson County was surveyed in 1826, the General Land Office notes describe a diverse and pleasing mosaic of heavy forest, open prairies and dry, semi-open oak-dominated woodlands. The Blue River coursed through rich bottomland forest, wet prairie and marshes on its way to join the Missouri River.

The present landscape of Jackson County has been drastically altered by man. Some of the change is from the elimination of natural processes like fire or the introduction of exotic species. Much of the change is simply the unceasing pressures of development and its accompanying habitat loss.

Fortunately there still exists a largely intact corridor of public land in western Jackson County that contains remnants of the area's original landscape. Places where a diverse native flora has persevered and where a surprising variety of wildlife exists and thrives within an urban context.

On the southern end of the Upper Blue River lies Jerry Smith Park and Saeger Woods Conservation Area, which contain the only remaining prairie in Jackson County.

Toward the northern end of the COA is Swope Park and Blue River Glades Natural Area, which contain limestone glades and woodlands perched atop the twenty-foot thick layer of Bethany Falls limestone. These fire-maintained communities contain a diverse prairie-like flora under a canopy of spreading old chinkapin and post oaks.

The Upper Blue River provides habitat for fish species reminiscent of the Ozarks like orangethroat darter and slender madtom. Riparian forests support migrating neotropical songbirds and are home to nesting birds like Yellow-throated warbler, Acadian flycatcher, Kentucky warbler, Pileated woodpecker and Yellow-crowned night heron.

Upper Blue River Conservation Strategies

- Reduce or eradicate invasive plants.
- Advocate for stream buffer ordinance adoption and implementation of best management practices on stream buffer lands.
- Work cooperatively across state lines to integrate the activities of the Upper Blue River COA with conservation efforts in the upper portions of the watershed in Kansas.
- Promote and build support for recreational use and trail development and work toward the establishment of a continuous recreational trail following the Blue River from the northern COA boundary to the state line.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of how natural community restoration and management enhance the recreational value, ecosystem function and biological diversity of the area.
- Promote sustainable economic development and land use consistent with watershed-level conservation practices.
- Build effective partnerships to accomplish goals.



Pat Whalen

Rough blazing stars and goldenrod provide a late summer display at Jerry Smith Park. The park's prairie remnants represent the last surviving prairie in Jackson County.

Priority Research and Inventory Needs

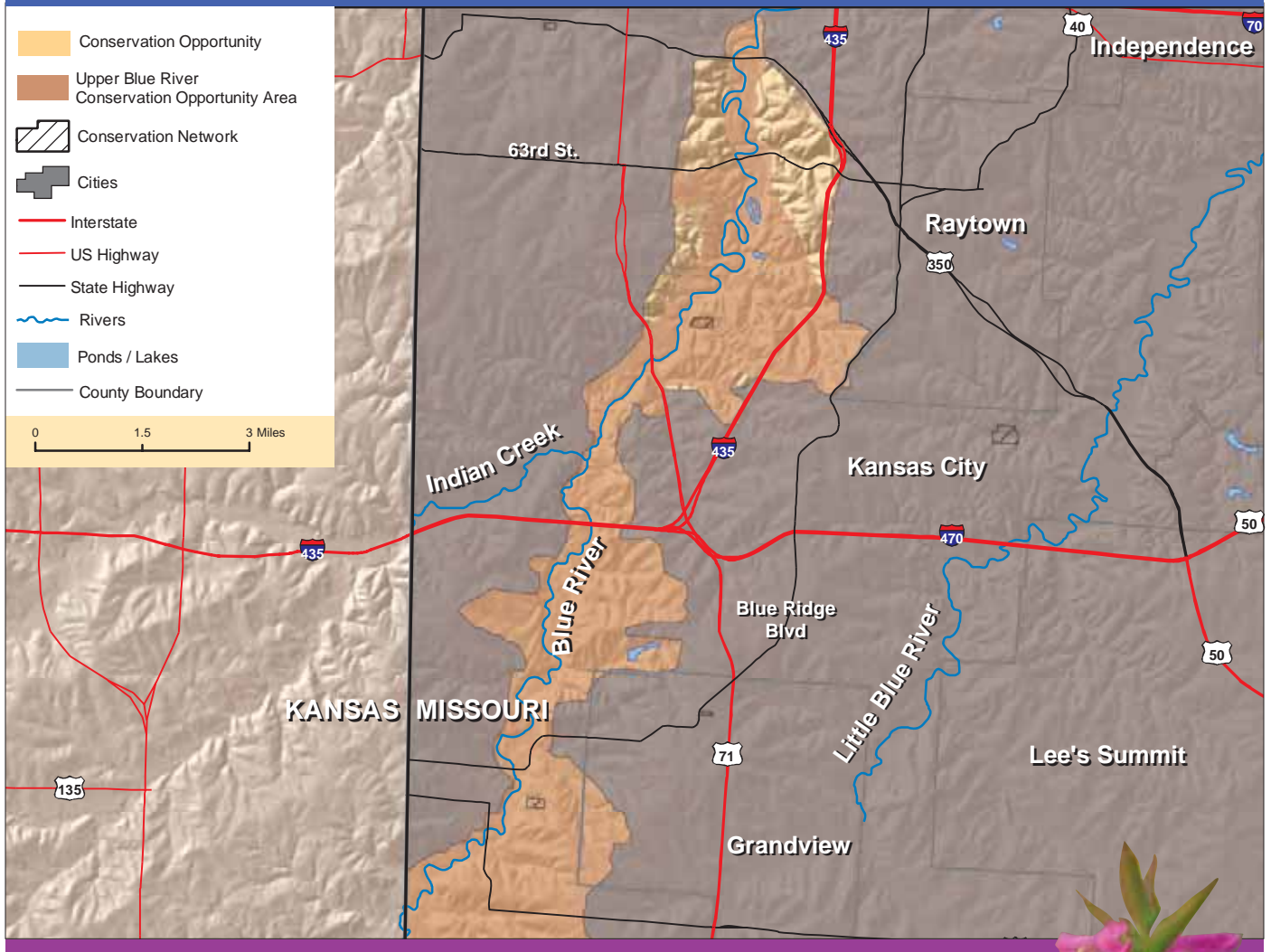
- Conduct an alternative futures analysis to model future watershed conditions, threats and impacts and to determine potential effects of development patterns on the conservation goals.
- Determine amount and location of open space needed to maintain the natural hydrology to the extent possible.
- Model and develop sustainable economic development scenarios.
- Update stream asset inventory within five years.
- Create indicators for monitoring quality of natural communities and success of conservation activities.
- Track success of shrub honeysuckle eradication through aerial monitoring.

Conservation Partners

Existing: Blue River Watershed Association, Burroughs Audubon Society, Earth Riders Trails Association, Friends of Lakeside Nature Center, Heart of America Flyfishers, Jackson County Parks and Recreation, Kansas City Parks and Recreation, Kansas City Trail Nerds, Kansas City WildLands, Little Blue River Watershed Coalition/Stream Team #2428, Mid-America Regional Council, Missouri Stream Team #175, Patti Banks Associates, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Missouri Department of Conservation.

Potential: Brush Creek Community Partners, Kansas City Power & Light Company, Kansas City Missouri Water Services Department, Kansas City Zoo, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Missouri Prairie Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club, Rockhurst University, Saddle & Sirloin Club, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, University of Missouri at Kansas City

Upper Blue River Conservation Opportunity Area



Funding Sources

Existing: Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative, MoDOT Federal Surface Transportation Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program, Wildlife Conservation Society's Wildlife Action Opportunities Fund, and MDC annual budget.

Promising Future Sources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, MDC Wildlife Diversity Funds, Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF), Missouri Department of Natural Resources (Recreational Trail & Section 319 Programs), National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grants, KC Public Improvements Advisory Committee, US Army Corps of Engineers (Section 514, 206 & 1135 Programs), USDA NRCS programs for private lands (CRP, FRPP and EQIP), US Environmental Protection Agency

Existing Conservation Network

Blue River Glades Natural Area, Blue River Parkway, Jerry Smith Park, Minor Park, Saeger Woods Conservation Area, Swope Park.

Eared false foxglove is a species of conservation concern in Missouri. The prairie at Jerry Smith Park and Saeger Woods CA contain the state's largest known population.

Pat Whalen



Invasive Exotic Species Control



Shrub honeysuckle dominates forest understories suffocating ground flora, preventing the growth of tree seedlings and destroying diverse habitat for wildlife. Kansas City WildLands involves urban citizens in hands-on restoration work to eliminate this and other problem exotic species.

Dylan Lehrbaum

Conservation Challenges

Protecting water quality in the upper Blue River is a daunting challenge. A diverse mosaic of natural communities are found in the Upper Blue River Conservation Opportunity Area, but all face threats by invasive exotic plants like shrub honeysuckle. Eliminating this and other species will require much effort over a prolonged period of time. The ability to conduct prescribed burns

to manage fire-maintained communities will be an ongoing challenge. Creating a quality trail system will require significant funding and labor. However, this COA has an abundant supply of “human capital.” Engaging the urban public will be essential for successful initiatives. Facilitating recreational use and restoring habitat are mutually intertwined goals in this COA.

To learn more about the Upper Blue River Conservation Opportunity Area, please contact:



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